



James Kilgour

JAMES KILGOUR

Patriarch of the Kilgour Family

by James Schroder

James Kilgour, pioneer, pastor, and educator, was a typical, deeply committed Scottish emigrant determined to improve his lot and that of his fellow man. A native of the County of Fife, Scotland, he was born in the town of Kirkaldy in the east of the Parish of Abbots Hall, on the 27th of August 1812. He came from a musical family of excellent singers, who were primarily weavers by trade. In politics they were all reformers or radicals. In religion, the Kilgours were originally members of the established Church of Scotland, but were inclined strongly towards the Baptists. From there it was but a step to the Church of Christ Disciples. Reports from church records indicated that James Kilgour was baptised in the Church of Christ in 1835. The church had previously been a Scotch Baptist Church and later adopted the scriptural name.

The second of five sons born to John Kilgour and Elizabeth Litster, James was very active, fond of games and a good athlete as a young man in Scotland. When he was about 19 he fell while vaulting, and broke his leg. The break did not mend and he was taken to Edinburgh to have his leg amputated. One of the doctors performing the surgery, Dr. James Simpson, was later recognized for inventing chloroform. The invention came too late for James Kilgour, however, and the amputation was done without anaesthetic. Because of this unfortunate turn of events, the course of his life was changed, from a youth bounding with energy and activity to a young man leading a sedentary way of life. James turned to teaching and preaching as a means of livelihood.

James Kilgour started a private school in Kirkaldy, teaching English, English Grammar, Writing and Arithmetic. The school must have prospered for on May 23, 1836, before he was 24 years of age, he married Anne Morton of Kirkaldy. He was a diligent and successful teacher, and his wife was a very clever needlewoman who could sew, knit and embroider beautifully.

In 1845, a company of 16 people left Scotland and sailed for Canada. James Kilgour and his wife, Anne Morton, their two young boys, John and James, and some of Anne Morton's family made up the group. They all came to Guelph and stayed for a couple of weeks while the men went and surveyed the countryside looking for a more permanent home. Knowing little about land quality, they chose Lot 11, Concession 5 in Eramosa because it had a house on it. The property was poor farmland and swampy. Shortly after their move, the house burned down. The family was forced to rebuild and this time constructed a house big enough for the Morton and Kilgour families.

Once in Canada, this man of bookish tastes with the physical handicap of only one leg faced the hard life of a pioneer farmer in the backwoods of Ontario. In 1848, he taught school in the district but soon became absorbed in the religious life of the Disciples community. He became one of their chief preachers and workers. Later he accepted a one-year posting to go forth and preach the gospel to the people. For one year he travelled, largely by horseback, south along the shores of Lake Erie and Lake Ontario, north to Owen Sound and Meaford, carrying Bibles, hymn books and a change of clothing in his saddlebags. His salary was \$300 per year, including travel and all other expenses. The year's work took nearly 15 months to complete, including frequent trips home to see the family and rest up to continue the journey.

But what about the Kilgour women? Each time James Kilgour left on one of his preaching missions, sometimes for months at a time, his wife was left behind. She had the task of looking after the farm, poor as it was, raising the children, and being there when he returned to comfort and console him. Small wonder that each of his three wives, who were left behind, often found that the only rest came at the end of a short life, lying in the churchyard cemetery. Imagine the scene on a cold winter night, with his wife dead in the house, James Kilgour the grieving husband, and his 14 year-old son riding on horseback to order his mother's coffin.

James Kilgour preached every Sunday morning at his home parish and Sunday evenings in the neighbouring parish. He was affectionate and tender-hearted, but with four young children and his busy preaching schedule, he needed a mother for his children and a wife to keep his home. James married Mary Thomson, a woman from Erin, and produced five more children, one of whom died in infancy. When this second wife died in 1866, he now had eight living children left motherless - John, James, David, William, Edmund, Peter, Annie and

Martha. By now James was well established in the school system, and with his steady income and the number of young women in the area, finding someone to come and look after his brood was not difficult. He relied on a series of housekeepers to fill in the gap. In 1857, James was appointed local Superintendent of Schools and then Superintendent for the whole of South Wellington County - a job he held for 21 years. His work kept him busy and frequently absent from home, leaving his eldest son John to keep the family together.

A learned man, James Kilgour was an avid reader and admirer of the work of Sir Walter Scott, buying all of his books as they were available. When Macaulay's *History of England* arrived, James and a neighbour were splitting rails. He and his neighbour alternated between splitting and reading until it became too dark outside to read. Once inside the house, they continued reading until the supply of candles ran out. They continued to read by the fire light - one would turn the logs to keep the light bright, while the other read. The two men kept on until three in the morning, when the book was finished.

The four oldest children were growing, and received higher education at the Rockwood Academy under the tutelage of the Quakers. As soon as possible, they received their teaching certificates, using teaching as a stepping stone to other employment possibilities. There were few opportunities for young men with little but ambition to start them off. Letters from the extended family who settled in Baltimore indicate that the situation in the U.S. was not better.

History was repeated when William, an extremely active and bright boy, suffered an accident in his early teens and nearly lost his leg. While he was confined to bed for several months and suffering severe pain, his older brother John gave up his teaching to return home and nurse his brother back to health. Like his father before him, this setback meant the end of sporting days and the activity William loved so much. He was lame for the rest of his life.

Most of the family remained in the Eramosa area, but the mid-1860s saw the beginning of the immigration to the United States with the departure of James Kilgour's second son, James. While that branch of the family never returned to live permanently in Canada, letters were frequent and visits as often as travel would allow. The balance of the family remained in Canada. Eldest son John taught school in Hillsburgh, eventually leaving teaching to learn business while working in Massie's store in Guelph. In 1868 he returned to

Hillsburgh to take on a general store in partnership with Thomas Till. In 1870, John married Sophia Oliphant of Everton. They had two sons: William Oliphant, who died in infancy, and James Frederick. The latter married Geills McCrae (sister of poet-physician John McCrae) before moving to Brandon, Manitoba where he practised law. Five years later, John and his family moved to Guelph where he went into the insurance business. Three more children were born: Annie (Buckingham), David Errett and Mary Edith (Bain). In the early 1880s, the family built the house at 49 McTague Street where they lived the rest of their lives.

James Kilgour's third son, David, became a druggist, first in Rockwood, then in Arthur where he married Jeannie Murray. David and Jeannie had three children: Maggie who died at five years old as a result of an accident, Jean (Cameron) and Will. When the children were grown, the family moved to London, Ontario.

William, James Kilgour's fourth son, taught school in Morriston, where he married Jennie McEdwards, and they had six children: James, Florence (Foulds), Donald, Edna (Schroder), Maud (Brayley) and Duncan. A few years after the death of James Sr., William and his family moved to Guelph and took over his father's house at 57 McTague Street. William went into C.W.Kelly's piano and music business and remained until his death in 1921. Daughter Edna continued to live in the family home throughout her life. She married Irvine Schroder and had two sons: Donald, who was killed in active service during World War II, and James, who became a professor of veterinary medicine at the University of Guelph, and later a Member of Parliament serving under the leadership of the Right Honourable Pierre Trudeau.

In 1870, still with four young children, now motherless, James Kilgour married Elizabeth Mitchell from the Dorchester area. His duties as school inspector, combined with his periodic preaching tours, often kept him away from home. A new mother for his children seemed an appropriate prescription. In 1873, the family left the farm and moved to 57 McTague Street in Guelph, buying a good house with a stable. James continued as school inspector and from Guelph drove all over South Wellington County twice a year. In 1878, at the age of 66, he resigned his post but continued to take a keen interest in education as a member of the Board of Education, and substituted while Dr. Torrance took his trip around the world in 1891. James also continued his devotion to the Church of Christ. In 1882, a small band of Disciples bought the Church of the Congregationalists called Zion Chapel, locat-

ed on Norwich Street, a fair distance from McTague Street. James walked that distance twice every Sunday.

In 1881, James's third wife, Elizabeth Mitchell, died after a long illness. Daughter Annie took over the role of housekeeper and nurse, caring for the rest of the family. Fifth son Edmund, who married Frances Bryans of Arthur, took over running Massie's Grocery Store on Wyndham Street. He built the house next to 57 McTague Street. He and his wife had five children. Hugh, the fourth son, was the only child to survive youth.

James's sixth son, Peter, left the Guelph area for Detroit where he was a bookkeeper and clerk in an office. From Detroit, he moved to Cincinnati where he had a position in the office of the Foreign Missionary Society of the Disciples. At the same time, Peter took a course in Homeopathy, and became a family doctor.

Martha, the youngest of James's children, qualified as a teacher and taught school in Guelph until 1890 when she went to Toronto, training as a nurse at the Toronto General Hospital, and becoming Assistant Superintendent of Nurses at the hospital in 1909.

In 1893, in his 81st year, James Kilgour died in his home at 57 McTague Street. He died peacefully, while lying on the sofa before going up to bed. Residents of Guelph well remembered the patriarchal figure with the long white beard sitting in a Windsor chair on the verandah - ready for a chat should someone drop by.

* * *

James (Jim) Schroder, great grandson of the original James Kilgour, compiled this information based on writings by Edith (Kilgour) Bain, references in *Old Everton* (pub. 1941) and other sources. He was born in the family home at 57 McTague Street and also shares the same birthday as his great grandfather. Today the house at 57 McTague Street still stands and now houses the fifth generation of the Kilgour family.